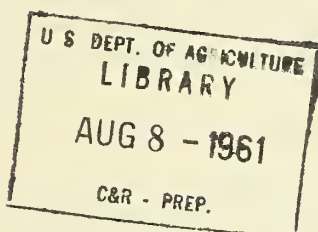


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THE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE
WHAT IT IS
AND
WHAT IT DOES



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THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE - WHAT IT IS AND WHAT IT DOES

The Soil Conservation Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture is responsible for developing and carrying out a national program of conservation for land and water resources.

The program includes activities authorized by several acts of Congress. The principal ones are shown in the footnote below.

The central objective of the Soil Conservation Service is an integrated system of land use and conservation treatment in harmony with the capability and needs of the land.

This is accomplished through unified planning that combines all the technologies, considers all the resources, and recognizes all the human interests that apply to each area of land.

Integrated Technical Planning

To meet this objective, the Soil Conservation Service brings together scientists and technologists from every discipline that can help to diagnose land problems and prescribe successful treatment. The technical staff includes soil scientists, engineers, geologists, hydrologists, range and woodland conservationists, biologists, economists, and, as circumstances require, other specialists.

These diverse technologies are projected and brought into focus on the land through a professional worker developed by the Soil Conservation Service--the soil conservationist. He is a conservation technician skilled in combining the methods of the physical, biological, and social sciences and applying them to practical problems of land owners and users in real-life situations.

Principal legislative authorizations of the Soil Conservation Service: The Soil Conservation Act (Public No. 46, 74th Congress, 1935); the Omnibus Flood Control Act (Public Law 738, 74th Congress, 1936); the Flood Control Act (Public Law 534, 78th Congress, 1944); the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 566, 83rd Congress, 1954, as amended by P.L. 1018, 84th Congress, 1956, P.L. 85-624, 85th Congress, 1958, P.L. 85-865, 85th Congress, 1958, and P.L. 86-468, 86th Congress, 1960); and the Great Plains Conservation Program (Public Law 1021, 84th Congress, 1956, as amended by P.L. 86-793, 86th Congress, 1960)

A second way in which the Soil Conservation Service integrates all aspects of land use and treatment is by assisting farmers and local groups to plan for each farm, ranch, watershed, or other land area as a whole--both as an economic unit and as a combination of land resources.

Equally fundamental is the concept that the several land resources--soil, water, plants, and animals--cannot be effectively used or managed separately. They are completely interdependent, and hence the land must be dealt with as a whole, acre by acre and farm by farm.

The application of integrated skills to the land as a whole requires a realistic appraisal of the combination of resources at any particular location. For this reason, conservation planning begins with a scientific soil survey, supplemented by such inventories of water, plants, or animals (e.g., woodland or range surveys) as may be needed to complete the picture.

The Soil Conservation Service recognizes people as a dominant factor in each local resource situation and as the reason for conservation itself. The resources of soil, water, plants, and wildlife are significant only as they provide for the needs of people.

On the individual farm or ranch, the owner or operator makes the decisions. The Soil Conservation Service technician interprets the soil survey and resource inventory in terms of feasible alternative physical and economic systems of land use and treatment. The needs and desires of the farmer or rancher get full consideration in the resulting plan, for it is, in fact, his own plan.

Likewise, the conservation "tools," such as credit, cost-sharing, and technical aid, cannot be separate and distinct conservation programs. To the farmer or rancher, they must be part and parcel of his programs. Thus, the Great Plains Conservation Program was conceived to relate all these things to the operator's planned conservation program.

Local people initiate and direct their own programs through their soil conservation districts. In each case, the Service is careful that measures recommended by its technicians are consistent with the local district program.

The effective integration of all aspects of land use and conservation planning --of technologies, of land resources, and of the interests of people as they apply to each unit of land--is the unique feature of the work of the Soil Conservation Service.

Assistance to Soil Conservation Districts

Public Law 46 established soil and water conservation as a national policy and created the Soil Conservation Service in April 1935. Farmer participation and local control were recognized at once as essential ingredients of an

on-the-farm action program. This led to the soil conservation district idea and farmers began to organize such districts under state laws in 1937.

By January 1, 1961 there were 2,870 districts in the United States. They included 90 percent of the Nation's agricultural land and 95 percent of the farms and ranches. Twenty-three States were completely covered by districts. More than 14,000 local farmers and ranchers were members of the boards that govern these districts. They serve without pay from any source much like local school board members.

The state enabling laws provide for State Soil Conservation Committees (Boards or Commissions) the membership of which are either named in the acts or are appointed by the Governor. As an agency of state government they guide the organization of districts and facilitate their functioning. They also serve to coordinate soil and water conservation functions of the state governments. In most states these agencies were designated by the Governors to give state level leadership to watershed program activities.

The soil conservation district has become a permanent part of the American agricultural scene. It is the central source of help and information about soil and water conservation in nearly every community of the Nation.

Districts Self-Governed

Each district is legally responsible for soil and water conservation within its territory just as a county is responsible for roads or a school district for education. Each district is autonomous and self-governed. It has authority to enter into working agreements with other governmental agencies and with private concerns to carry out its purposes.

The Secretary of Agriculture has entered into a Basic Memorandum of Understanding with each district, an agreement that sets forth mutual understanding of cooperation. Numerous Federal and State agencies have formal or informal working arrangements with individual districts.

The Soil Conservation Service, under a Supplemental Memorandum of Understanding, channels most of its on-the-land assistance to farmers and ranchers through soil conservation districts.

The SCS has the major job of providing technical assistance to farmers and ranchers in planning and doing soil and water conservation in line with the conservation program adopted by the district board.

Under this Supplemental Memorandum, SCS provides the services of professional conservationists to help plan and apply conservation measures. Usually it locates a work unit in each district.

SCS Services to Individuals

Services available from SCS through every district include:

1. A detailed soil and land-capability map of the cooperator's farm or ranch; a range site and range condition map of rangeland.
2. Local and specific information about the different safe uses and adapted crops (including grasses, trees, and wildlife) for each kind of soil.
3. Information about the conservation practices needed on each kind of soil with each of the possible systems of use.
4. Consultation service from a professional conservationist to help the individual make a basic conservation plan.
5. Technical services as needed to design, lay out, and check the construction of dams, terraces, or other structures; to decide on the varieties of plants, seeding methods and rates, and cultural practices to use in establishing grass or trees as planned; and to answer technical questions that arise in managing pastures, woodlands, or wildlife.

In addition, many soil conservation districts arrange for and offer cooperators other services and facilities to help them with their conservation work. These vary with local conditions. Some of the more common are: Equipment for earth-moving, seeding, or other unusual operations, usually for hire or for rent on a cost basis; planting stock of trees or shrubs; scarce seeds at minimum cost; specialized technical assistance from woodland- or wildlife-management agencies.

Soil conservation districts, their leaders and their voluntary State Associations and National Association have had a tremendous impact upon American agriculture, and upon national conservation programs.

Through them, the land-use pattern has been changed on several million acres across the country. District leaders played a big role in developing the Small Watershed Program and the Great Plains Conservation Program and are largely responsible for making these programs effective locally.

Farm and Ranch Conservation Plans

Individual farm and ranch soil and water conservation plans are the backbone of assistance to Soil Conservation Districts by the Soil Conservation Service.

SCS believes that nearly all farms or ranches need planned conservation programs, based on currently sound technology, to guide their conservation progress effectively.

SCS recognizes that soil and water conservation must be accomplished through human effort, and that it gets done only when the farmer or rancher has (1) the knowledge and (2) desire and (3) the means to do it.

SCS policy has always been to help soil conservation district cooperators plan practical conservation progress wherein land is used within its capability and treated according to its need for the planned use.

The basic job of SCS as the Department's technical agency in soil and water conservation is (1) to show cooperators why planned conservation is needed on their land, (2) show them how to do the more difficult jobs, and (3) inspire them to action.

Benefits of Conservation Plan

The conservation plan:

1. Gives the farmer or rancher a true picture of his soil and water resource, his land's conservation needs, and management problems.
2. Enables him to make needed land use changes and to install needed combinations of conservation practices in a step-by-step orderly manner.
3. Insures that he will install only necessary practices; will install in the right order all practices supplementing each other; and that he will avoid those that might throw his farm operation out of balance.
4. Provides the most efficient use of his time, labor, money and equipment.
5. Provides the fullest safe use of each acre, which insures stable production and income and the lowest possible production costs.
6. Forms an acceptable base for loan applications.
7. Provides a sound basis for the farmer's and the public's conservation investment.

By June 30, 1960, SCS had assisted 1,301,450 farmers and ranchers to prepare basic conservation plans. This represented 27 percent of all operating units and 30 percent of the agricultural land in soil conservation districts. An additional 500,000 farmers and ranchers were being assisted by SCS as they worked to the completion of their plans.

Soil Survey Work

Soil surveys provide the base for nearly every other phase of the SCS program as well as for many other agencies and organizations.

SCS has leadership responsibility for the Federal part of the National Cooperative Soil Survey. The work is carried out in cooperation with the State agricultural experiment stations, the Forest Service, and many other State and Federal agencies.

The basic purposes of the soil survey are: (1) To determine the important characteristics of soils; (2) to classify the soils and name them according to a Nationwide system; (3) to interpret the soils according to their capabilities for use under alternative management systems for crops, grasses, and trees and according to the properties significant to engineering; (4) to show the distribution of soils on maps of high accuracy at scales appropriate to the landscape; and (5) to publish the results as soil survey reports including maps, the basic soil descriptions, and the basic interpretations. In addition, SCS cooperates with other agencies who prepare special maps and reports designed for immediate use by farmers and other users.

Soil boundaries are plotted on aerial photographs by soil scientists examining soils in the field. Recognition is given all soil characteristics that affect their use, including texture, structure, chemical composition, and other properties of the individual layers of the soil as well as total depth, slope, stoniness, degree of erosion, and any other features that influence how the soils respond to management.

During the early years of soil survey activities chief attention was given to the uses of the work by farmers. But so much information is gained in making a soil survey that it serves a great many other purposes besides those required by agriculture. Soil surveys are not only used by farmers, ranchers, and foresters but also by engineers, urban planners, land appraisers, and others. In recent years the engineering interpretations have become especially important to State highway departments and others.

Farm Woodland Work

The Soil Conservation Service provides to private landholders technical assistance in conservation on woodlands as a necessary part of a conservation plan for a land unit. For many thousands of owners of small woodlands, this is the only encouragement or assistance they have ever had to improve and make use of their woodlands.

SCS Work Unit Conservationists are trained to give assistance in the selection of land suited for tree planting and to give technical assistance in planning woodland practices such as tree planting, stand improvement, windbreaks, shelterbelts, gully stabilization, streambank control plantings and similar conservation practices involving trees and shrubs.

A staff of forestry-trained technicians is employed by SCS to develop guides and standards for woodland conservation technical assistance and to train work unit staffs in techniques necessary to correlate woodland conservation practices with complete conservation farm plans. Where State forestry agencies are

prepared to provide landowners with specialized forestry services, SCS provides a liaison service to assure coordination, but does not duplicate the services.

Because a high proportion of total forest holdings are in private ownership as parts of farms and interspersed with farms, soil conservation districts have generally included woodland conservation and forestry services as an integral part of their program. In 1960 nearly half of all trees planted on private lands were on farms and ranches cooperating with soil conservation districts. Tree planting has nearly tripled in soil conservation districts since 1956. In 1960, nearly a million acres of trees were planted in districts.

As this program grows, farmers and ranchers are requiring additional technical help in relating soils information to the landowner's job of growing wood crops on their woodlands as part of over-all conservation and land-use planning. This leads to the need for "forestry services" from public and private sources in specialized aspects of woodland conservation.

Range Conservation Work

Since a third of the Nation's farm and ranch land is used for the production of native forage and produces more than 95 percent of our meat and wool, conservation work on non-Federal range lands is one of the major activities of the Soil Conservation Service.

SCS range conservation work is designed to assist land owners and operators to:

1. Appraise the productive potential of their land and its suitability for forage and livestock production from the standpoint of soils, climate, and economic factors.
2. Develop a sound and economic plan for conservation ranching based on a scientific inventory of soil, water, and forage resources.
3. Reduce soil and water losses on rangelands and aid in the restoration and improvement of the forage resources by the application of sound conservation measures.
4. Maintain a permanent, stable, and productive livestock industry with as complete utilization of the forage crop as is consistent with protection of the soil resources and permanence of forage production.

In 25 years of working with landowners on their rangelands, SCS had made many contributions.

For example, the ability to recognize different kinds of rangeland and to determine their potential has proved to be a highly useful tool in ranch conservation planning and is a marked improvement over older methods of "range surveys." Developing a practical method of determining the condition of rangelands has been another.

A sound conservation program on rangelands starts with a knowledge of the soils, just as it does on lands used for other purposes. This important fact was not adequately recognized for many years. SCS developed technology to recognize and map soil differences reflected in native vegetation a sound basis for range conservation and management. This information gives land owners the key to the potential productivity of their range. An appraisal of the condition of the range, area by area, furnishes clues to action needed for its improvement.

Wildlife Conservation Work

The Soil Conservation Service gives consideration to wildlife values in all its activities. It recommends and helps farmers and ranchers in soil conservation districts plan positive steps to increase wildlife as a primary product of the land where appropriate and as a part of the multiple use of soil and water resources. In all activities it seeks to avoid unnecessary damage to wildlife and to favor the increase of beneficial species as a corollary result of land use and soil and water conservation practices.

SCS has a small staff of wildlife biologists to provide technical guidance to wildlife aspects of its programs and to give needed training to field personnel. Through its field organization, which makes technical services available through soil conservation districts to a high percentage of farmers and ranchers in the country, SCS is the principal agency in the Department of Agriculture dealing with wildlife conservation problems on private land. Such work is done in collaboration with state government wildlife agencies.

SCS attention to wildlife is based on the following considerations:

1. Wildlife is a product of the land. All kinds of animal life depend on the land for their fundamental requirements of food, shelter and water. Upland game, waterfowl, fur animals, fish, or any other kind of wildlife can be produced as a crop by manipulating the plant cover, water, and other landscape features that make up its habitat.

2. Animal life is a natural part of the farm or ranch environment. A balanced wildlife community contributes to healthy biological processes favoring plant growth, good soil tilth and stability, and orderly water economy. Abnormal populations of certain species create pest problems, as with rodents and insects. Management of wildlife populations is an essential part of agricultural technology.

3. Most of the Nation's wildlife is on farms and ranches. Wildlife is a recreational resource of increasing importance. Most of it is produced on private land.

As the pressure of growing population makes increased demands on agriculture, the fortunes of wild creatures are more and more in the hands of farmers and ranchers.

4. Conservation farming and ranching benefit most kinds of wildlife. Land use patterns fitted to land capability create variety in vegetation. They preserve areas naturally unsuitable for cultivation in permanent cover or water.

Experience clearly demonstrates that wildlife, including waterfowl, can thrive and reproduce in an agricultural setting. Constructive cooperation by farmers and ranchers, conservation organizations, and Government agencies can assure even greater abundance in America's rich wildlife heritage for the future.

The Soil Conservation Service considers that the encouragement of soil and water conservation which contributes to wildlife conservation on agricultural land is one of its important responsibilities.

Plant Materials Work

Since its inception SCS has been constantly searching for new plants with which to solve soil and water conservation problems. Early experience showed that widespread soil erosion and water loss were caused by cropping land not suited to cultivation, excessive use of row crops, incorrect tillage methods, and overgrazing of pastures and rangeland. In returning eroded lands to vegetation it was soon found that the available grasses and legumes were not good enough to do the kinds of jobs that had to be done. Thus, the search among native and imported plants was started and still goes on.

The first step is to assemble native or introduced seed and plants from foreign accessions or plant breeders at 18 Plant Materials Centers to determine their range of climatic and site adaptation for solving urgent conservation problems. These 18 centers are located so as to represent the different major regions of soil and climate throughout the country. An example of an urgent conservation problem is the earth fill of a watershed structure that must be vegetated to prevent the fill from washing away. Another is planning for converting cultivated land back to permanent vegetation in the Great Plains. In both cases previously unused native grasses proved more effective than domestic ones.

Plants that have shown promise on the Plant Materials Centers are tested on farms on a field scale to determine their fitness for climate and soil under farm conditions. This is a step that is often lacking in much of the investigating work of this type. SCS has the advantage of the great number of soil

conservation district cooperators available and willing to carry on these field tests. The testing is done under normal farm conditions with regular farm equipment. The plant is treated as a regular crop. Such testing meets the conditions of farmers who will eventually need to use the plants.

After a plant has met the requirements, the seed is increased by district cooperators and cooperating Crop Improvement Association members. Quality seed is thus produced and sold on the market through commercial channels.

As a result of this work, nearly 100 kinds of improved grasses and legumes, unavailable in the past, now can be obtained on the market and put to use doing a better conservation job.

All of the work done at the Plant Materials Centers is in cooperation with existing state agencies. Twelve of the 18 are operated by SCS, five are under agreement with state universities and one is under agreement with a State association of soil conservation districts.

Watershed Program Activities

The Department of Agriculture's principal watershed activities on privately owned lands are those authorized by the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, Public Law 566, which is administered by the Soil Conservation Service. Nearly 300 such projects were underway on March 1, 1961.

In addition, work is continuing on 11 watershed projects comprising about 30 million acres authorized in the Flood Control Act of 1944, and is nearing completion on some 58 pilot watersheds provided for in the USDA Appropriation Act of 1953.

These projects grew out of the early SCS watershed demonstration projects and the Flood Control Act of 1936, the first Federal law to recognize the need for runoff and waterflow retardation and soil-erosion prevention on watersheds as a principal means of flood prevention.

Work under the 1944 congressional authorization began in 1946. It was soon determined that the only feasible approach was to divide the large watersheds into subwatersheds, and tackle the land treatment and construction measures small watershed by small watershed.

Following World War II, the pressures for upstream watershed management mounted rapidly. By 1953, 300 voluntary or corporate watershed associations had been organized. These organizations, in association with soil conservation districts, and supported by many national organizations representing agriculture, business, labor, and wildlife, campaigned vigorously for an accelerated program of upstream watershed management.

In 1953, the Congress appropriated \$5 million with which pilot small watershed projects were started throughout the Nation under the basic SCS authority, Public No. 46, enacted in 1935.

One objective of the pilot projects was to demonstrate in representative areas of the Nation the benefits of combining soil and water conservation on the land with upstream flood-prevention structures. The other was to find out the best ways to achieve local-State-Federal teamwork in planning and carrying out watershed protection and development.

Under this authority 33 pilot projects have been completed, 15 are scheduled for completion in fiscal year 1961, and about seven will be continued beyond fiscal year 1961.

Early Work Points Way

The work in subwatersheds of the 11 watershed projects and the pilot projects has been successful not only because of its flood prevention and watershed protection benefits. It has shown how to handle flood waters on small watersheds effectively and at low cost. It has served as a training ground for technical personnel. It has served as a proving ground for techniques that are now being applied in the P.L. 566 program.

Few conservation acts have created as much popular interest and activity in such a short time as has Public Law 566. By March 1, 1961 local organizations had prepared applications for assistance under its provisions in some 1,600 watersheds. Applications had been approved by designated State agencies in 48 States and Puerto Rico, and had been transmitted to the Department of Agriculture. These applications cover more than 100 million acres. To provide more effective State and local participation in this program, the legislatures of 40 States had enacted more than 150 pieces of State legislation. Additional new legislation is being prepared for consideration by the legislatures of several States.

By March 1, 1961 the Soil Conservation Service had provided planning assistance to 619 watersheds containing more than 43 million acres. Based on completed plans, approved administratively or by congressional committees, as required, 294 projects containing about 17 million acres had been authorized for operations and an additional 34 completed plans were in the process of approval. Of these, 143 were under construction.

Gap In Resource Programs Filled

The popularity and support of the Public Law 566 program throughout the Nation indicates that it truly meets a long-felt need for organized action to fill a gap in national resource conservation and development programs. Prior legislation had provided, on the one hand, for programs of public land conservation and for technical, educational, cost-sharing and credit assistance to individual private landowners and operators. On the other hand, the Reclamation, Flood Control, TVA, and other Acts had authorized large programs of Federal development of downstream river resources, including large irrigation schemes, hydropower development, flood control, navigation and, secondarily, fish and wildlife development, recreation, and municipal or industrial water supply.

The gap left by these programs occurs in the small watersheds, generally those of less than 250,000 acres. The small watersheds have many of the same needs for land and water management that exist on the larger rivers. More than half of the flood damage in the Nation occurs in these upstream watersheds. A larger percentage of the irrigated farmlands of the West are within or get their watersupply from small watersheds. Most drainage needs in the East are confined to small watersheds. Thousands of towns and small cities use surface water supplies from such watersheds. Fish and wildlife and recreational development must be greatly accelerated on small watersheds if the need for such development is to be brought within reasonable distance and cost to the average citizen. Many of the problems of erosion, as along water courses, or of phreatophyte control can be effectively solved only by public action programs in small watersheds. In fact, of all water resource developments only navigation and hydropower seem to be confined to, or even predominant on, our larger rivers.

Principles of Program

The Public Law 566 program was a response to this need, hammered out in the Federal executive and legislative branches in the early 1950's. Its fundamental principles are (1) local initiative and responsibility, (2) Federal technical and financial aid, and (3) State review and approval of local proposals with the wide open opportunity for State financial and other assistance.

Preliminary estimates from the Department's National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs indicate the dimensions of the watershed job ahead. The reports show a need for project-type action on 8,300 watersheds or 75 percent of the total number of small watersheds delineated in the Nation.

These watersheds contain approximately one billion acres or 55 percent of the Nation's land area. The inventory shows an estimated 63 million acres needing project action for flood protection in upstream watersheds, 14 million acres needing project action for irrigation, and 46 million acres needing project action for drainage.

Water Resource Activities and River Basin Investigations

Activities of the Department of Agriculture in the field of water resources that involve interagency cooperation and cooperative work with State governments are assigned to the Soil Conservation Service.

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act administered by SCS provides broad authority to cooperate with State governments and with other Federal agencies in river basin planning, surveys and investigations.

River basin surveys are undertaken at the request of the cooperating States or Federal agencies. They are extremely valuable in maintaining coordination between the upstream watershed aspects for which USDA has responsibility and the downstream problems of water resource use and development.

Cooperative river basin surveys and investigations, although authorized by the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, are not directed specifically toward developing watershed projects. It is more accurate to describe this work as cooperative studies to provide a basis for coordinated resource developments. As a result of these studies, however, watershed projects are frequently found feasible and are subsequently planned.

Snow Surveys and Water Supply Forecasting

Most of the water for the Western States -- for agriculture, industries, cities, power -- comes from the snow that falls in the mountains.

How much water will be available is determined by snow surveyors who measure the water content of the mountain snowpack in the winter and estimate the acre-feet of runoff from each mountain watershed.

Several times each winter more than 1,000 snow surveyors measure the snowpack on some 1,300 snow survey courses in remote, rugged mountain areas of the Western States and British Columbia. They cover about 35,000 miles on skis, snowshoes and specialized over-snow machines in the roughest kind of country under hazardous climatic physical conditions.

Data they collect are translated into a water supply forecast issued by the Soil Conservation Service, usually about mid-April. Water users of the West base their plans for the year's operations on this forecast. Interim reports are released from time to time during the winter.

The Soil Conservation Service has Departmental leadership for conducting the snow surveys in cooperation with other Federal, State and private agencies.

Great Plains Conservation Program

The Great Plains Conservation program was authorized specifically by P. L. 1021, enacted in 1956.

It is a long-term soil and water conservation program aimed at bringing about needed land use adjustments and the application of enduring conservation practices.

In the Great Plains, an area of severe climatic hazards, various programs have been carried out in the past to meet emergency situations. These have been carried out at a relatively high cost. The Great Plains Conservation Program is designed to bring about a more nearly permanent solution to the problems resulting from drought and the cultivation of low-grade cropland.

This program was recommended by the Great Plains Agricultural Council, by farm organizations, soil conservation districts and others. Responsibility for administration was assigned to the Soil Conservation Service.

Local leadership from soil conservation districts, without cost to the Federal Government, is largely responsible for the progress of this program.

Technical assistance and cost-sharing are integrated in carrying out conservation plans over a period not to exceed 10 years. Cost shares are specifically limited to installing permanent non-recurring practices and are obligated at the time the plan is developed and the contract signed. This guarantees the availability of funds to apply the needed practices on schedule and to make the changes in land use that are required to cope with the soil and climatic hazards of the Great Plains.

Farmers and ranchers maintain all practices and, in addition, have been willing and able to carry out, as a condition of contract fulfillment, annual recurring practices such as stubble mulch farming and deferred and rotation grazing, without Federal cost shares.

Converting land unsuited to cultivated crop production from such use to grassland and the reseeding of depleted rangelands have top priority in this program. By July 1, 1960, about one-third of the 1.5 million acres of cropland in Great Plains Conservation program plans had been contracted for converting to grass along with the reseeding of almost one-half million acres of depleted range. These practices, together with water conservation measures and the control of competitive shrubs, have meant the obligation of about three-fourths of the available cost-share funds.

Soil and Water Conservation Needs Inventory

The Department of Agriculture and cooperating State and local agencies are bringing to a conclusion a National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs.

The Inventory will provide the most thorough and objective picture we have ever had of the Nation's privately owned land and water resources for which the Department of Agriculture is responsible for carrying out programs of conservation.

On publication, the following kinds of information will be available for every county, watershed, and land resource area, with State and National summaries:

1. Basic data on kind of soil, slope, erosion, and land use, with interpretation in terms of land capability.
2. Current (1958-59) and expected (1975) land use by land capability subclass.
3. Acreage in each land use (cropland, grazing land, woodland, and other) needing conservation treatment, by dominant kinds of problems significant for each land use.
4. Delineation of all small watersheds (250,000 acres or less) and number and area needing project action to deal with water problems.

The Inventory was initiated in response to a growing demand, both from inside the Department and from without, for this kind of information, which was not available from any source.

To meet this need the Department established in 1956 the National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs, set up an interagency committee to make the inventory and keep it current, and assigned responsibility for leadership to the Soil Conservation Service. Similar committees were established in every State and county.

Field surveys and collection of data have been completed in every county. All States have compiled their reports and they are now being reviewed by the National interagency committee. Preliminary National summaries are available but formal release of the data awaits final review and refinement of the figures in some areas.

A host of research councils, institutes, universities, chambers of commerce, river basin study organizations, and other public agencies have expressed a great interest in the use of the Inventory data. In addition many commercial concerns, including fertilizer, farm equipment, irrigation, seed, utility, and other companies concerned with agriculture, are asking for information about production potentials and trends in land use.

Radiological Monitoring Work

In the event of nuclear war or major nuclear reactor accidents, the Soil Conservation Service must shoulder two important responsibilities assigned to it in 1959 by the Secretary of Agriculture.

The first of these is to plan and place in a state of continued readiness a nationwide system for radiological monitoring of agricultural land (excluding lands within national forests), water, livestock, harvestable crops, and crops stored in rural bin sites. This assignment also requires SCS to be prepared to advise landowners and operators (1) how to use lands or commodities partly contaminated with radioactive substances, (2) which lands cannot be used, and (3) when contaminated lands can be returned to production and commodities safely used.

The second of these responsibilities is to plan and place in a state of readiness 1,325 stations, widely spread over the country, where radioactive fallout can be detected, measured, evaluated, and reported. This is part of the Federal fixed network of radiation-monitoring stations developed under direction of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization. From these stations' reports, maps can be prepared of the national fallout situation.

Technical Services to ACP

Through the Agricultural Conservation Program of the Department of Agriculture the Federal Government offers to share with farmers the cost of applying certain soil and water conservation measures. The national program is set forth annually in an Agricultural Conservation Program National Bulletin, and each State program through an Agricultural Conservation Program State Handbook. Also, county programs are set forth annually for each county in the United States.

State and county programs are developed to meet the conservation problems in the State and county within the principles and policies of the national program.

Responsibility for the administration of the ACP at the national level is assigned to the Commodity Stabilization Service. In the States and counties this responsibility is assigned to the State and County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committees. County committees accept applications from farmers for cost sharing and issue payments to farmers after conservation practices have been satisfactorily applied.

The Soil Conservation Service is assigned responsibility to (1) help formulate the annual Agricultural Conservation Program at the national, State, and county levels, and (2) carry out certain technical phases of the program in the counties.

SCS is responsible for the technical phases of about 20 practices offered in the ACP. The responsibility for technical phases of applying ACP practices on the land include the following steps:

1. A finding as to whether the practice is needed and practical on the farm or ranch.
2. Necessary site selection, other preliminary work, and layout of the practice.
3. Necessary supervision of the installation.
4. Necessary checking and certification of performance.

Farmer requests for ACP assistance on conservation practices for which SCS is assigned technical responsibility are referred to the SCS Work Unit by the county ASC committee. During recent years about 500,000 such referrals have been made annually.

When the conservation practice is completed satisfactorily, the SCS technician certifies this on the standard form to the county ASC committee. The county ASC committee cannot issue cost-sharing payments to farmers and ranchers for applying ACP practices for which SCS has technical responsibility until an SCS technician has certified satisfactory performance.

Congress makes provision in the annual appropriation act for the Department of Agriculture to assist in financing technical assistance to the ACP through transferring to SCS up to 5 percent of the ACP funds allotted for use in counties.



Growth Through Agricultural Progress